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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000280

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: In meeting, key JVP leader tries to take moderate tack, but hard-line views show through

Refs: (A) Colombo 271; (B) Colombo 109

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Polchief met February 19 with Somawansa Amarasinghe, a key leader of the JVP party. Amarasinghe tried to assume a moderate tack on most issues. Glints of a hard-line showed through, however, in his harsh views toward the ceasefire accord with the Tigers and also toward the governing UNP, which cracked down on the JVP insurrection in the late 1980's. Amarasinghe, who indicated that he was back in Sri Lanka for good after years of exile, will likely be a baleful influence on Sri Lanka's already turbulent political scene. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) MEETING WITH KEY JVP LEADER: Polchief met February 19 with Somawansa Amarasinghe, a key leader of the radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP - "People's Liberation Front") party. Amarasinghe, who was clearly being careful in what he said in his first meeting with a USG interlocutor in years (he has been in exile in Europe -- see below), tried to assume a moderate tack on most issues. He said, for example, that he strongly supported "all ways to bring ethnic reconciliation to Sri Lanka." Brushing off years of criticism that the JVP is essentially Sinhalese extremist in ideology, he asserted that the party did not support any form of "ethnic chauvinism" and was working to bring all communities together. Polchief underlined that it was vital that the campaign for the April 2 parliamentary elections not be used in such a way that harmed the fragile peace process. In response, Amarasinghe said the JVP would be careful on how it dealt with the peace process in the campaign because it "did not want this important peaceful era to end."

3. (C) Polchief also noted concerns from the Sri Lankan business community and international investors about the JVP's economic views. Amarasinghe replied that the JVP supported business investment of all types, noting that he had addressed Sri Lanka's Joint Business Forum ("JBIZ") on February 17 in order "to alleviate all concerns."

4. (C) GLINTS OF A HARD-LINE: Despite his efforts to appear reasonable and restrained, glints of a very real hard-line showed through in many of Amarasinghe's remarks. Most particularly, he was quite critical of the ceasefire accord reached between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in February 2002. Amarasinghe charged that the accord had been reached "secretly" by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) and contained provisions which were "very favorable to the LTTE." Polchief countered that the ceasefire accord was the linchpin of the peace process and efforts to undermine it would have very serious repercussions. Amarasinghe said the JVP had no plans "to throw out" the accord if it won the election in league with its Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) allies. The JVP might well lobby for changes, but he said the party realized that the SLFP took a different approach on peace track issues (the SLFP is skeptical of the GSL's peace process policies, but less critical of them than the JVP). (Also, regarding the peace process, Amarasinghe -- as touched on in Ref A -- went on to hit out at the Norwegian peace facilitation effort, charging that the GoN favored the LTTE.)

5. (C) ANIMUS TOWARD THE UNP: Amarasinghe saved much of his bile for the UNP. Amarasinghe, who is the last surviving official from the JVP "politburo" that launched a bloody 1987-89 insurrection, asserted that the UNP had mistreated the opposition "in countless ways" since coming to power in December 2001 and had proven itself "corrupt." When asked if any of his animus stemmed from the UNP's successful crackdown on the JVP's revolt, he said that some of it did inasmuch as several of the current UNP leaders had been in power at that time, including PM Wickremesinghe.

(Wickremesinghe was a mid-ranked minister at the time.) He said he did not think Wickremesinghe was directly responsible for what he characterized as "atrocities" committed against the JVP in the 1980's, but he was not sure. In any case, he said, it was a fact that JVP founder Rohana Wijeweera had been killed in custody by order of the UNP government. (Wijeweera died in mysterious circumstances while under police custody in November 1989. Wijeweera's death effectively ended the JVP insurrection.)

16. (C) Noting a certain wistfulness in Amarasinghe's eyes when he discussed Wijeweera (the two were close associates), Polchief queried whether the JVP had given up on any notion of returning to violence. Amarasinghe said the group had, and indeed had made this commitment in public "on countless occasions." Even if "UNP thugs attack us, we will not retaliate," he said. The party "accepted democracy and the ballot" and would "not resort to arms again." He then cited the alliance with the SLFP, which he said indicated that the JVP was a "mature organization that was committed to peaceful change." Questioned on how the JVP might do in the election, Amarasinghe hesitated and then predicted it would win about 25 seats (it now has 16).

17. (C) COMMENT: Amarasinghe spoke excellent English and was quite articulate, even charming during the meeting. He indicated that he was back in Sri Lanka for good after years of exile in the UK and other sites in Europe. (Amarasinghe returned to Sri Lanka last month. He was out of the country from 1990 until 2004, except for one brief trip made during the 2001 parliamentary campaign. See Ref B for additional biographic details.) While sophisticated and thoughtful, Amarasinghe appears to be a hard-line element in a hard-line party. His influence in the JVP appears considerable, as he is considered to be a senior statesman who was close to the revered leader Wijeweera (a huge photograph of Wijeweera was hung in the room at JVP headquarters where the meeting took place). Given his apparent hard-line perspective, which seems to have been solidified by years of exile, he is likely to be a baleful influence on Sri Lanka's already turbulent political scene. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD